DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 645 CE 054 059

TITLE	Basic Skills and the Education Reform Act. Viewpoints: A Series of Occasional Papers on Basic Education. Issue No. 10.
INSTITUTION	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, London (England).
PUB DATE	May 89
NOTE	18p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA, England (1.25 plus shipping).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; *Adult Education; *Community Education; *Educational Administration; *Educational Legislation; Educational Policy; Extension Education; Foreign Countries; *Government School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Education Reform Act 1988 (England)

ABSTRACT

This document, one of a series of British occasional papers on adult basic education, provides a variety of views on the British Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988. The papers and their authors are "A Chief Education Officer's View of the Education Reform Act" (Michael Garnett); "Basic Education--Some Reflections" (Tom Irwin); "ERA--Investment or Speculation?" (Sally McKeown); "Towards a Community Education Strategy for Adults" (Ray Phillips); and "Basic Education for Adults Post ERA" (Elizabeth Weightman). (CML)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314645

VIEWPOINTS

A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON BASIC EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A Wells

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ISSUE No. 10

BASIC SKILLS AND THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT

A CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER'S VIEW OF THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT · Michael Garnett

BASIC EDUCATION – SOME REFLECTIONS · Tom Irwin

ERA – INVESTMENT OR SPECULATION? · Sally McKeown

TOWARDS A COMMUNITY EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR ADULTS · Ray Phillips

BASIC EDUCATION FOR ADULTS POST ERA · Elizabeth Weightman

RDS4

VIEWPOINTS

A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON BASIC EDUCATION

Introduction

The Education Reform Act 1988 is the most substantive piece of legislation to be enacted since the 1944 Education Act. Its effect is likely to be felt throughout the Education System both immediately and in the longer term. Although it is not primarily concerned with basic education many of its key aims are likely to have an effect on our area of work.

This issue of Viewpoints includes a variety of views concerning the Reform Act and its effect on basic skills work. Michael Garnett considers the issues involved from his perspective as a Chief Education Officer, Humberside LEA whilst Sally McKeown from Coventry reflects on the need to ensure that the Act does not result in an erosion of good practice. Elizabeth Weightman, from the Further Education Unit (FEU) offers some pointers to effective planning and Tom Irwin, from Kirklees and Ray Phillips of Newham Parents Centre look at the effect of the Act on basic skills work in the light of wider social and economic developments.

Contents

A CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER'S VIEW OF THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT 2
Michael Garnett

BASIC EDUCATION – SOME REFLECTIONS 4
Tom Irwin

ERA – INVESTMENT OR SPECULATION? 7
Sally McKeown

TOWARDS A COMMUNITY EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR ADULTS 10
Ray Phillips

BASIC EDUCATION FOR ADULTS POST ERA 13
Elizabeth Weightman

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors alone and are not necessarily shared by their employers or the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit.

A Chief Education Officer's View of the Education Reform Act

MICHAEL GARNETT

Michael Garnett is the Director of Education for Humberside County Council. He was formerly Deputy Director.

Whilst walking in Wales over Easter I personally recognised the frustration and potential danger that uncertainty of meaning of language presents. Were we to meet at Corscffylau or Cefhycerrig? Being largely unfamiliar with Welsh word patterns and pronounciation, both names blurred in my memory like meaningless codes. Thankfully grid references resolved ambiguity, a device not available to the many who lack basic skills with the English language.

The Education Reform Act, like Wales, has an uneven topography and numerical referencing provides an invaluable framework for access. Some of the boggy areas will no doubt be firmed up eventually by caselaw, but in the meantime DES Circulars and informal and untested advice prevails. The Education Reform Act does provide however for radical change in the maintained and voluntary education system and is intended to have profound effects upon adult literacy levels. Will the determination of an individual's progress against standard attainment targets focus in on and tend to improve literacy levels in schools? Certainly the National Curriculum proposals for mathematics and English have been generally well received and encourage current good practice. It is clear that the Government's commitment to change is based upon a wish to improve clients' performance generally and to construct a market place that provides more choice and more competition. A further important intention, that of relating output to resources expended is hampered by the lack of any adequate objective measure of input.

Long before the impact of a changing client group is felt however, there are important questions to be posed and answered about the organisation and structure of adult education, of which support for adult literacy is one important part. The issues are complicated by changing demography. The increasing numbers and proportion of adults compared with 16 – 19 year olds will cause new tensions about who are to be the most appropriate providers. Increased demand from clients can only be matched if more funding can be identified or generated.

Perhaps the most radical proposal in the Act is that historical funding for further education colleges should be swept aside and that in future funding should be distributed on the basis of an agreed formula covering all colleges in a local education authority. The most important element of this formula will be the number of students enrolled. The incentives will be to enrol the maxium number of students and teach them as efficiently as possible. Some discretion will be available for authorities to weight student numbers in terms of the kinds of programme that they are involved in or by mode of attendance. Questions arise immediately as to how basic education is to be valued and presented in this arrangement. For many authorities that provide basic education both through colleges of further education and through free standing adult education services there are further questions about whether similar mechanisms of distribution of funding or organisation should be adopted.

In my view questions of this kind can only be resolved by a process of consultation and decision making based upon clearly defined and discrete notions of policy determination, strategic planning, resource distribution, curriculum and professional development delivery, review and monitoring. Ideally such a process cannot be restricted to basic education, not even to adult education, but should encompass the whole local education authority system of continuing education and training that arises in response to the needs of young people as they complete statutory schooling or others as they contemplate re-entering education and training at appropriate levels. Such a review must build upon a partnership with the voluntary sector and with university provision.

The timescale to achieve all of this seems frighteningly short, but policy development work has not been static in authorities over the last decade and what is required now is a rapid synthesis of the various strands of development.

Interestingly the Education Reform Act opens with a clear commitment to establishing partnerships between central government, local authorities and local providers which "promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development" of the prime clients, young people and adults in the community and prepares them "for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life". Local authorities will be associating this statutory statement with their own policy aims and objectives for continuing education and training. It is this person centred starting point that ensures that personal and social development needs are identified and that appropriate responses are tailored. In this context any separation of policy statements between those of 16 – 19 year olds and adults becomes unhelpful. Certainly clients with basic education needs and entitlements can be identified in both sectors. Arguably the concentration of commitment in policy development and in the deployment of resources of further education towards full time 16 – 19 year olds has been based upon a historically derived craft qualification or initial training view of the adult working environment. This view has always been wasteful of human resources because it relies upon fuelling changing skill needs in the workforce by training a plentiful supply of talent on entry often at the expense of shedding older staff. The demographic change will require a pragmatic shift in view, now re-entry and retraining must be encouraged. The golden retriever will replace the golden handshake. There are already signs that a greater appreciation of basic education has been recognised by central and local government and it will be easier in the future to justify expenditure in this area. Criteria of effectiveness and efficiency, through appropriate performance indicators will be as important in this area of development as in others, but at least the climate of opinion will be receptive to the policy of development of basic education. Simply, as the number of 16 – 19 year olds declines, a greater proportion of them must be encouraged to continue in full or part time continuing education and training than in the past, and a greater proportion of adults must be empowered to seek progression.

Much depends upon the emergence of widely agreed and transferable performance indicators based upon good practice that can be used to quantify and justify the resource commitment required and measure progress. How can performance indicators adequately deal with such positive outcomes as confidence building, empowerment, improvement in oracy skills, horizontal as well as vertical progression, and

improvement in self image?

In this area the pioneering work of ALBSU has been invaluable. The importance of outreach activity and the notions of one to one and small group work and of the provision of advice and counselling all supported by appropriate staff development have been clearly articulated.

Policy statements at authority and institution level ensure that elected members and governors understand and have regard for all of the aims and objectives of the service. Basic education should figure strongly at both levels, but can only do so with conviction if practitioners and participants have some chance of commenting upon their formulation and content.

In many local authorities policy statements make clear the balance of provision between basic education provided in further education and tertiary colleges, and in free standing adult education services. In some cases the division is largely historical, in others it is made following careful analysis of the balance of advantage associated with the two forms of provision in a particular area. What is important is achieving agreement about the level of weighting of funding for basic education clients, wherever they are found, and a mechanism for local determination of how funds are to be distributed and deployed between the various providers if a number are present.

What is clear is that where colleges exist they will have governance and funding determined by the Education Reform Act with a majority of funding distributed on a student weighted basis. What is not clear however, and potentially more problematic, is the commitment of new style governing bodies largely drawn from the commercial sector to the ethos and objectives of adult basic education. In Britain industry and commerce have been singularly uncommitted to the notion of continuing education and training, at least in terms of the reality of level of spend, compared with almost any other of our economic competitors. I guess the government's wish to involve industrialists more directly in governing bodies, as with Training and Enterprise Councils, is as much an attempt to attach some allegiance by them to these processes, as in changing the direction of further education. Questions arise about how user groups, community groups and advisory groups can have status and influence within these arrangements.

Strategic planning provides a process for connecting policy with provision over a defined timescale. It will need to take account of the demography and socioeconomic characteristics of the authority. Issues of ethnicity and gender will need to be tackled. Clearly there are already well developed precedents for strategic planning and the routeing of resources to support agreed planning objectives. The whole process of planning in authorities that predated the involvement of the Department of Employment's Training Agency encroachment into work related non advanced further education, and now more generally defined further education, must encompass the whole of continuing education and training and build upon authorities' and governors' development plans for schools which are also emerging from the Education Reform Act. Fortunately such planning commitments are generally resilient enough to withstand the covert reduction of funding recently discovered amidst Department of Employment budgeting.

Providers of basic education will need to consider what contribution they should be making to strategic plans and the kinds of management information they will need to provide to inform this process. Simply, what size of client group is there, what proportion is currently participating, what staffing levels are currently deployed, what proportions are part time, what commitment is there to voluntary staffing, what account needs to be taken of non teaching functions, what commitment and costs are associated with recruitment and training and monitoring of the higher proportion of part time and voluntary staff? All these questions are likely to have very special answers in relation to basic education.

Management information about the rate at which resources are deployed and used inevitably poses questions about the value added outcome for the clients involved. For basic education this provides potentially the most difficult area within the current vogue for ever more precise statements of input and output. Increasingly, because of demographic changes, the emphasis will be upon demonstrated access and progression into continuing education and training or work. In fact considerable potential for growth exists in terms of supporting access to training for adults through various Training Agency initiatives, local authority managed European Social Funding programmes, Health Authority and Social Services commitments to care in the community. Those involved in management and planning should be clear what would be required to deliver say a ten per cent growth in the volume of clients supported and what are the implications for full time, part time and voluntary workers in terms of recruitment training and resources.

What is clear now is that local authorities will need to specify and quantify spending on curriculum and staff development on an annual basis and the commitment to basic education will need to be clearly defined and quantified within this package. Without appropriate evaluation of the market place and the quantification of need, basic education commitment is likely to be derived from a reinterpretation of the historical basis at best or be the subject of tokenism at worst.

A first test of an authority's commitment to supporting the development of adult education and basic education will be the extent to which it promotes within it's strategic planning for schools, through local management of schools funding, appropriate resources for continuing education and training to continue to use the many venues already used on a regular basis by staff and students, not just for teaching but for advice and counselling sessions. An important corollary will be the extent to which local authorities choose to use their statutory opportunity to provide a policy amounting to a direction to school governing bodies to give due emphasis to the development of community education and community use.

The Education Reform Act will have a significant impact on the continuing education and training provision over the next few years. For many colleges and adult services these changes will be the latest in an evolutionary development based upon an increased awareness and responsiveness to the needs of the client, the market place and the employer. It is important that the issues associated with basic education are well understood and articulated at each level of policy, planning, management and delivery if the opportunity presented by this chance to overcome the inertia of the continuing education and training system is to be grasped. Central and local government and industry and commerce all recognise that if a smaller workforce is to drive a developing economy, adults have to be a good deal smarter than they were in the past. Basic education has an important contribution to make to this process and should be selling itself hard.

Basic Education – Some Reflections

TOM IRWIN

Tom Irwin was appointed to Kirklees LEA in April 1988 as Assistant Education Officer 16 Plus with a brief which includes responsibility for policy towards adult and continuing education. He has also worked extensively in further education and was a REPLAN officer in Kirklees with a brief to develop opportunities for unemployed adults.

The LEA is currently planning to amalgamate its free standing adult and continuing education service with the two FE colleges starting in the North of Kirklees from September 1989.

My aim for basic education within my own Authority is to achieve a better spread of opportunities across the area and a coherent strategy for creating and maintaining progression routes for students. The opinions expressed in the article are mine not my employer's. I was invited to generalise and to lay bare some of my values and I have done so.

Kirklees: The Place and The People

In 1974 the Metropolitan District of Kirklees was formed from parts of 11 former local authorities. As a local education authority Kirklees Council inherited a mixed portfolio of legacies including a free-standing adult education service which owed much in philosophical terms to the West Riding of Yorkshire but never enjoyed the same level or funding or political support. There are two FE colleges in the Authority; one broadly serving the north and the other the south of the district. North Kirklees is a conurbation of small towns: Batley; Cleckheaton; Dewsbury; Heckmondwike; and Mirfield; covering a sizeable area with boundaries sometimes hard for the stranger to spot. The major town in South Kirklees is Huddersfield but a good slice of the population lives in the large, semi-rural areas to the south and west of the town where large villages such as Holmfirth, Skelmanthrope, Meltham and Marsden serve as distinct centres. The whole area is a mix of the urban and semi-rural conditions common in West Yorkshire where communication between places in different local authorities is often easier than travel from one part of the authority to another. The population contains many people of Irish and Eastern European descent as well as Pakistani and Gujerati Moslems; Sikhs; Afro-Caribbeans; and other smaller groups of people from a range of backgrounds.

Education for Adults

There are four area based Institutes of Adult and Continuing Education (the Adult Education Service) in Kirklees each of which, as well as both FE colleges, have provided some aspects of basic education; by which I mean literacy and numeracy teaching. In addition to this recent years have seen the establishment of literacy and numeracy support in the Community Programme and VPP programmes and more recently in Employment Training. There is no doubt that much well-intentioned effort had gone into basic eduction in Kirklees but this has never produced a coherent policy for ensuring access to learning opportunities across the area. The overall level of funding has never been high, although ALBSU staff assure me it falls within the middle of the range. The diversity of provision has arguably led to what has been available being used in a less than optimal manner. It has certainly meant that learning opportunities for people with literacy and numeracy difficulties have never been extensively marketed. Nor have they been equally or adequately distributed throughout the district.

Basic Education: Who Needs It?

I have seen various estimates of the proportion of the population deemed to have problems with basic educational skills. The ALBSU document, "After the Act", suggests that 13% of all adults have some sort of literacy and/or numeracy problems and that 20% of the long-term unemployed have significant problems. Whatever the figures, we are nowhere near reaching a majority of these people. The Government is persuaded that lack of basic educational skills is a major factor in long-term unemployment and low economic growth. Let's unpack some of this. Firstly, it is my experience of life that educational achievement is strongly related to the distribution of life chances and the currently unfashionable notion of class. Secondly, despite all the hype about skill which has characterised the 1980s I am not sure I believe that so many jobs require real "skills" that significant numbers of people lack. What happened to arguments about deskilling? Thirdly, skilful behaviour takes time to learn and perfect and it seems likely that those who have only poorly acquired skills of literacy and numeracy in their youth will require more than the short sharp shock of a six month training scheme. However, whatever the weaknesses in the analysis with which we are presented, it is clear that the climate is favourable for developing basic education programmes with a vocational emphasis, whether through Employment Training, employers or independently with individual clients. This offers a challenge to traditional adult education based literacy and numeracy provision where this has become stuck in a cycle of low funding and low accountability. In the future I believe there will be a direct trade-off of improved funding for increased accountability. If the demand for literacy and numeracy can be demonstrated then I believe the resources needed to expand provision will be found. Ensuring that the learning opportunities created are appropriate and genuinely meet students' needs, "quality control" in the manufacturing metaphor of the post-industrial age, will be critically important.

What's On Offer?

The Adult Education Service in Kirklees was never designed to run with the level of full time staffing with which it has had to manage since 1980. The level of funding available for basic education has been based on cash limitation rather than needs analysis and has led to patchy provision which I will argue below has become locked into servicing certain fractions of demand at the expense of others. Passing experience suggests this is a far from unique situation. Provision includes individual tuition and classes which I suspect often consist of groups of students who appear together but work alone. There is some use of volunteers, usually as aides in classroom situations and the tradition of employing the basic education "organiser", who is paid on a part-time teaching rate, to plan and supervise the work of ther paid part-time staff and volunteers has gone unchallenged until this year. In some cases the organising time actually exceeds the teaching time of those who are supervised. Within the FE colleges much of the emphasis on literacy and numeracy has been concerned with support for students enrolled on vocational

courses with some overlap with adult education in the provision of classes for people who presented themselves as basic education students. Recently both colleges have begun to develop "workshop" facilities for a range of students.

Job Clubs

There is much to learn about recruitment from the techniques applied by job-clubs and other Training Agency initiatives. It is also essential that we cater for a wider range of students who may have quite diverse needs, levels of attainment, and motivation. We should also provide access to hi-tech learning and reinforcement materials and aim to move students towards increasing independence. It is of critical importance to improve access, both by increasing neighbourhood provision, which is too thin on the ground and patchy at present, and by other means. We should develop better links with industry, training schemes and the voluntary sector as well as with individual students.

I was very sceptical about job clubs. How, I reasoned, could a scheme devised for redundant executives in America work with long term unemployed, ostensibly unskilled, working class adults in the North of England? I figured it would be made to look good by the MSC (as was) with its flair for propaganda rather than analysis – but would they really work? My guess, based on random observation, is that for some people they did but that most clients failed to progress into full time, lasting, "real" jobs. However, I suspect that the unacknowledged outcomes may have been more significant. In one local council estate a traditional adult literacy class had staggered on with a small handful of students. When this was replaced by a job club which recruited through targeted mail shots and Restart interviews dozens of people, most of them with some sort of literacy problem, passed through the doors. Some aspects of the recruitment may be hard to take but the activity was purposeful, a number of people went onto other things: schemes, jobs, or education. Energy was released but it wasn't harnessed well. Somewhere between the ideology of the new and the old, things snarled up.

Traditional adult education provision of literacy and numeracy teaching seems to have been dogged by a number of difficulties. Firstly, it has been predominantly staffed by part-time workers, usually women, who were prepared to trade-off low pay against other priorities or demands on their time which made part-time work attractive. In my experience it is rare for part-time workers to develop the confidence, authority and awareness to effectively question the organisational issues affecting their work. Instead, people develop coping strategies to survive poor circumstances which lock them further into a cycle of inadequate funding, limited provision, low pay and low expectations.

Moving On!

I have observed a tendency for resources to get stuck to particular client groups. Understandably, where funds are scarce people target those most in need. However, these students may well be at a level of performance and degree of need which will lock up those resources indefinitely. If they absorb all the funding, the problem becomes compounded. You won't set up activities for those who can move on to move to. What starts as well-intentioned can become sterile: as students have no-where to go there is a disincentive to stress progression. If students have low expectations or are used to institutional settings they readily adapt to this arrangement. They will probably say they like it. So there's nowhere else to go, they don't want to go away and so they walk round the treadmill. This downward spiral of expectation may also suit teachers expecially if they only have to do it for 4, 6, 8 hours a week. It can also lead to displacement activity: if you can't contemplate progression, you can care for people while you've got them. The danger is that you patronise and institutionalise the clients.

There is a further, related danger. When is someone who can't read not a literacy student? I get the impression that a number of students (many may be an overstatement) with learning difficulties become long-term inhabitants of basic literacy classes. That they are students is fine: but are their needs recognised? Are they well served by the methods of literacy teaching? I am concerned particularly where students are almost wholly involved in solitary activities, often working alone in a crowd. It may serve their literacy needs but if their primary need is social then surely associative activity is important. Better diagnosis and carefully set targets are important too.

Basic education must be seen as a foundation on which to build other learning which inevitably means that we must consider progression and routes by which people can create access to the learning they want to do. It also means that we must encourage independence and find appropriate ways to encourage, monitor and evaluate student attainment and progress. Education advice and guidance for adults is an essential ingredient in lending coherence to the efforts currently made by many individuals and some institutions. No matter what emphasis is given to moving on some students are likely to spend long periods in basic education and the implications of this for students learning and for the resources of the service need to be carefully considered.

Special Needs

Basic Education has particular relevance for students who have special educational needs either because they are mentally handicapped or mentally ill or have more general learning difficulties sometimes related to physical disability. Some good work has been undertaken in this field including teaching linked to the Care In The Community initiative. The Eduction Reform Act charges Local Authorities with making adequate provision for students with special eductional needs. This LEA is reviewing special needs provision for the 16 plus age range in order to assess its responsibilities and will take into account the relationship between such provision and the teaching of literacy and numeracy to adults. There are weighty issues to be resolved here not least of which is the question of who pays for what. Kirklees, in common with many other LEAs, does not charge for basic education provision but has neither qualified this position nor defined basic education. If care in the community leads to an increase in ill-considered referral of people with special needs to local authority basic education services this must be resourced. Whether funding comes from the Area Health Authority, Social Services or Education Departments of local authorities is unimportant so long as the mechanisms are understood and work. I have observed a growing tendency for institutional "carers" to suppose that classes freely available to individuals should be similarly open to their clients. Whilst on one level I should hate to refuse anyone access to such provision; on the other, we occupy a world of cost centres and there is a need for the funding to go in where it's coming out.

Basic Education And ESL

In Kirklees as in other authorities with sizeable populations for whom English is not the first language there is a significant volume of ESL teaching. Within the colleges this has been linked with ESF teaching which, particularly in one college, has recently grown much more quickly. Within the adult education service ESL has co-habited with basic education; partly because both were "bolt-ons" to the main vocational and non-vocational class programmes; partly because of parallel organisational forms, such as the use of volunteers; and partly because ESL was to some degree perceived to be concerned with literacy problems among non-English speakers. Perhaps more as a result of proximity than affinity, local basic education and ESL staff often raise similar issues and speak a similar code. I am curious. How many ESL students are really basic education students for whom English isn't the natural medium of expression? And how many have no real literacy or numeracy problem but merely lack fluent English? When the issues are veiled by issues of culture, religion

and the complex political games within which these are sustained, as the reader may not be surprised to find is the case locally, how will we ever know the answers? Therefore, for complex reasons, reform of basic education cannot easily address some of the issues surrounding the educational needs of ethinic minority communities. In practical terms, the tactic is to first encompass that which can be easily grasped and leave the rest for later.

Childcare

As a matter of prejudice I am prepared to believe that childcare for those in work and education in Britain is the worst in Europe, particularly if one is to take account of the informal back-up provided by the family in parts of the Continent. For many women and for some men adequate creche facilities are the "sine qua non" of re-entering education and the labour market.

So – What Are We Going To Do About It?

In both North and South Kirklees the Local Authority wishes to promote more coherent basic education provision. This will be achieved by building better links between the colleges, the adult education service and other Authority services such as Kirklees Employment Training, Worktrain and the ITEC. It is not the Authority's intention to rush developments but to take advantage of certain anticipated changes as they occur and to work towards the achievement of this aim over a period of time. I referred in my introduction to the Authority's intention to amalgamate the Adult Education Service with the FE colleges starting in North Kirklees in September 1989. Although the initial impact of the change of management on some aspects of the service may be minimal basic education will be significantly affected by change almost immediately. The reorganisation of services will throw together staff from both services who have previously worked separately if not competitively. This alone implies a change in existing practices, roles and relationships but the situation will be further affected by the start of one of the education support grant projects to be established in the early summer of 1989.

An Open Learning Centre

This project is concerned with the establishment of an Open Learning Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy: one of a chain of such centres which will spring across the country in 1989/90 as a result of this funding. The centre will provide a base for drop-in learning; learning by appointment; access to information technology and all the other good things identified in the ESG circular. In itself, such a centre offers considerable promise. But from first reading the circular I believed that the establishment of such a centre could act as a catalyst for more radical and lasting changes in the organisation and provision of basic education. How much better to have a centre which not only provided facilites on site but could plug enquirers into a whole range of off-site opportunities? And, if we're doing that: why not make it a resource centre for staff? And, if the centre is going to be the hub of the literacy and numeracy service: who better than the centre manager to be responsible for co-ordinating and managing the rest of basic education provision? We are now implementing these ideas and will have a unified basic education service in North Kirklees by September 1989 which will include among its staff all the existing college and adult education personnel and the staff of the new Open Learning Centre. A Centre Manager/ Team Leader with a lot of experience and local knowledge has been appointed and we look forward to making a reality of creating a bigger, better, more accessible, modern, coherent, and more viable service. I do not think this will be easy, nor will it happen over-night. We have funding for three years. New staff consist of the Centre Manager, a full-time clerical worker and some part-time technician help. The staff team will include basic education organisers, teachers and volunteers from the college and two (present) adult education areas. The project will not be isolated from the mainstream college systems as the centre manager will be a senior member of a newly formed Directorate for Adult and Continuing Education within the college and therefore a full member of college staff. However she will also be responsible to a steering committee which will advise the Principal and Governers of the college and the LEA on matters connected with the project.

Making It Work

In implementing this scheme, we hope to learn how to provide access to the education and training people want. I expect a lot of hiccups but I am confident it will work in time because it uses a model which can investigate need; invite usage; co-ordinate resource use; record, monitor, assess, and evaluate competence and performance; and suppport claims for extra resources with clear arguments. When this occurs, I am confident that such claims will be met because of genuine concerns for a more literate and numerate workforce which exist among fragments of British society which would make odd bedfellows on other issues. There are questions which will be posed as well as those which will be answered by this centre. How does one best market literacy and numeracy, when the lack of them has typically been stigmatised. When someone asked me what I would call the centre, I replied that in my experience, the Red Lion had always been a name to conjure with when drawing the crowds. The Open Learning emphasis may be more helpful in this respect than the Literacy emphasis. But this immediately raises the question of what ones does with customers who aren't perceived as basic education clients. The answer must surely be to link the work of the centre to the development of careers and education advice for adults and both to the planning of more flexible learning opportunities. Locally we have seen a considerable move forward this year in the Authority's support for such developments and an advice service for adults will be established with mainstream funding from September 1989. This is particularly encouraging as it demonstrates a clear commitment to continuing education by Kirklees Councillors. Partly because of the way in which ESG funding was determined it was not possible to repeat this scheme in South Kirklees this year but we are going ahead with a more limited scheme of co-operation on basic education in anticipation of a full merger which will take place at a later date.

What About The Workers?

These proposals have implications for staff which I believe are positive. In both parts of the Authority the initiatives will require a great deal of staff development and support. The need for staff training particularly in new technology is recognised in the plans for in-service training in the FE/AE sector. There is no suggestion that full-time or part-time staff will face reductions in earnings as a result of these changes nor is there any suggestion that provision will be centralised on college premises. Far from it: there is encouragement for improved outreach into the community. To a very large degree the future of basic eduction will depend on the profile given to the service by staff and the degree to which the large numbers of potential clients can be attracted into the service.

Conclusion

It is possible to be cautiously optimistic about the future of basic education if the service is able to respond positively to change. We need to address the needs of a wider range of potential students; to respond to the increased awareness of the need for greater literacy and numeracy in work and in training; and to improve access to learning opportunities. If we can attract sufficient demand and explain effectively the importance of what we are doing I am confident that the resources needed to do the job will be found. The best way of ensuring this is to make more creative and stragegic use of the resources available at the moment.

ERA – Investment or Speculation?

SALLY McKEOWN

Sally McKeown is Head of the BEN (Basic English and Numeracy Unit) at Coventry Technical College. She has worked in education for about 15 years and this has included a secondment to Jaguar Cars as a Press Officer.

As you flick through the ads in the Times Ed., does your eye wander over those prestigious jobs for advisers or HMIs? When was the last time you saw an advert for an "Adviser for literacy" or an "HMI in Adult Basic Education"? Have you ever seen such a post?

At a time when the government is waking up to the low level of basic skills in the adult population, when it is reforming the school curriculum and tub thumping about a return to the 3Rs, it seems odd that there have been no in-built monitoring systems. Where is the quality control department in Ken Baker's Eduction for the People plc? Does this matter to the ABE tutor and does it have anything to do with the Education Reform Act? The answer to both questions is emphatically yes. The whole of education is undergoing very radical changes which will affect working conditions, how courses are funded and ultimately the whole philosopy which underpins Adult Education. At this stage it is impossible to predict with any confidence whether the final outcome will work to our advantage or cut right across the approaches we have developed in ABE.

This article is an attempt to examine the system under which we operate now, what the new system says it will be like and to predict some of the possible long term effects which are not spelled out in the Act. Let's start with the current system (in a fine example of Newspeak "current" also equals old.) Most tutors and co-ordinators seem to have very little notion of how decisions are made and how funding is allocated. This is not because we have no interest in such matters or are mis-informed but because the system is so huge, shapeless and arbitrary that it proves impossible to obtain concrete information. Provision takes place in a variety of settings: borstal hostels, day-care centres, schools, community centres, Adult Training Centres, FE colleges, employers' premises, prisons, managing agents' premises, to name but a few at random.

The majority of us feel it is appropriate that provision should go out to the people; it should be, as far as possible, at a place and time of the student's choosing. However, here is snake pit number one: the setting and student group will often dictate who pays the bill and this in turn will dictate the tutor's wages which in turn may ultimately decide whether the course runs or not.

Many tutors employed by the local authority are paid at grade 5 rate, currently £10.59 per hour. However, a tutor may well be paid by the local authority but receive an Adult Education rate on an instructor's grade of pay which is considerably lower. Many authorities now have some full time ABE staff but in some cases part time organisers are paid to co-ordinate the activities of a scheme: to interview volunteers, order materials, follow up student referrals etc. In other cases, the organiser is paid simply for teaching hours and all the other duties are seen as part and parcel of the "preparation needed to ensure the smooth running of a class". In other words, the proper management of a scheme may depend on goodwill rather than being a contractual obligation.

Provision up till now has really been quite arbitrary and different parts of the service have obtained funding from different sources. A quick check among colleagues in the West Midlands revealed that funding came from the following sources:-

- the FE budget
- the Secondary Division budget
- Adult Education
- Special Needs
- Social Services
- Community Education budget
- Leisure and Recreation
- no specific division but culled from various resources

One of the most common replies was "I'm not sure, it's not that easy to be specific." I find myself in great sympathy with this view. If funding is eclectic and arbitrary at the top, how can we at the bottom end be precise and well informed?

So, the old system was fragmentary, largely unplanned and inadequate, reaching less than 5 per cent of the target group, and it trundled along with minor variations for a long time. Now suddenly there is the Education Reform Act. Surely any new system can do better. Do we have anything to lose? I, for one, suspect we might.

The media has focused almost entirely on the impact on schools: the National Curriculum, core subjects, science for all, CTC's, parents and industrial reps on Boards of Governors, opted out schools and above all, assessment, in fact assessment to the power of 4, at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16.

Not so much has been written about the impact of ERA on post 16 education and even less has been written about ERA and ABE. It is hard to judge whether we are being presented with a golden opportunity to put ABE firmly on the planning agenda or whether the cold wind of arrant commercialism will undo some two decades of developing good practice.

Having read the Education Reform Act, as opposed to other agencies' commentaries on the Act, I was struck, not by what the Act said, but how much space was allocated to the different sections. Of course I knew about the dissolution of ILEA but I was surprised at how detailed this section was. Indeed, in a cynical moment, I wondered if the entire rationale behind ERA was to get rid of this thorn in the flesh. After all ILEA was the most powerful of the LEAs. It seemed to me that the long term aim of the government might be to abolish all local education authorities or at least to castrate them.

Polytechnics and qualifying HE colleges are leaving LEA control. Soon all FE colleges will have greatly increased autonomy especially in the areas of finance and personnel. Maintained schools face a two-pronged attack from opted out schools and CTCs' Already, in many authorities, cleaning services and maintenance work on educational buildings are farmed out to private companies. Some former local authority employees have formed their own companies and bid for contracts along with others. In some areas, careers services and local government treasury departments are being decentralised.

What will be left for local authorities to administer? More specifically, if LEAs are eroded, what will happen to county/borough organisers or those peripatetic ABE staff who spend their week in several different institutions? Will they end up forming their own companies and bidding for work? If schools opt out on a large enough scale, all schools might end up being opted out. Then it would seem likely that ABE workers who teach community classes in a school would eventually become

members of the school staff. One of the dangers here is that schools often have different priorities from Adult Education and will be more answerable to their governors than they are now. In turn, governors will be subject to pressure from parents and local industry representatives rather than from the LEA.

If the literacy tutor leaves will she be replaced? I am sure, with 1992 in view, many governors might prefer an extra language teacher who would introduce a second or third language to the school curriculum and teach a few adult eduction classes on the side. Of course, none of this might happen but then who would have predicted the demise of ILEA a few years ago?

We are in a great period of uncertainty at the moment in ABE. The government seems aware of the great need for increasing the provision of ABE yet, paradoxically, there are no appropriate structures and little increase of resources at local ABE level.

Restart opened the floodgates of students requiring help – the government responded by attacking the schools for not paying enough attention to the basics. No additional funding was available when we were dealing with all those extra students. Traditional ABE remains a chronically underfunded service, largely staffed by part-timers. Now there is ET.

The government put some 1.4 billion into Employment Training and recognised that "special provision" would have to be made for people with literacy or numeracy problems. Training Managers can, if they wish, subcontract this part of their work to LEA providers. In many cases they do not wish to do so. It is cheaper to employ (or redeploy) staff for this work. It was suggested that we "experts" develop a consultancy role, but it is not happening or a large scale. ET providers welcome advice and recommendations for materials but they are unable or unwilling to pay for our services.

ET providers are gradually taking over many areas of work we used to service. Increasingly, this work is done in-house. Sometimes the staff are experienced ABE practitioners, committed to do the best for their "clients" as we must now learn to call them. In other cases, provision is appalling. Staff are untrained, inexperienced and have no idea where to start. Attitudes which we thought had died out years ago are reemerging, and there is evidence of some schemes resorting to materials designed for children.

It would have been logical for the government to have chosen to put some of that 1.4 billion into extending existing ABE schemes to meet the increased demand. Instead, much of the money has found its way into the coffers of the private training sector. This may prove to be a foretaste of what is yet to come under ERA.

When colleges become autonomous in 1990 money will be allocated according to the number of Full Time Equivalent students. Different courses have different weightings. For example, workshop courses with high levels of consumables (such as bricklaying) have a higher weighting than classroom based courses. The pattern of attendance – full time, part time or block release – also affects the weighting.

This could be good news for schemes which are bursting at the seams with students, but bad news for small groups. In the past it was often possible to offset low numbers in one group by higher numbers elsewhere. Heads of Departments could use their discretion. If numbers were high in all other sections in the department then they could run a few courses with small numbers. However it seems likely that there will soon be target FTEs for individual subject areas. The LEA may suggest that x per cent of the FTE should go to ABE students (or the unemployed or the disabled) but there will be no compulsion on individual colleges.

It is easy to see that when financial targets are set for institutions then the management will be tempted to run courses for overseas students and for local companies rather than for "the disadvantaged". There is also some doubt about whether ABE will be regarded by the powers that be as a "course" because provision is often small scale and part time.

On the bright side, there is reference to adult learners with Special Needs in the ACT.

"a local education authority shall also have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties."

A person is deemed to have learning difficulties if:

"a) he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age; or

b) he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by the local education authority concerned"

and

"A local education authority shall have power to do anything which appears to them to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of or in connection with the exercise of their functions under this section."

While it is cheering to see that adult Special Needs students are specifically mentioned, there seems to be a lot of room for interpretation here. The Act says LEAs must have regard to: the needs of people with learning difficulties; in some LEAs this might mean simply setting up a working party!

Nevertheless, the first definition of learning difficulties is broad enough to encompass many types of ABE students and might be useful in formulating arguments for statutory provision.

LEAs will have the power to do anything which appears "necessary or expedient" but will this be backed up with cash? Above all, who will decide if a person has learning difficulties? Will we see "statementing" for adults or will a student have to have attended a special school to come into the category?

Certainly we are going to see an increasing demand for certification. The old benchmark for literacy used to be whether you could write your name. Now many employers ask for GCSE grade C in the hope that they will weed out employees with literacy problems.

The Education Reform Act states that:

"The Secretary of State may make regulations requiring every local authority to publish, in relation to each institution maintained or assisted by the authority .... the educational achievements of students at the institution (including results of examinations, tests and other assessments of those students.)"

Already staff in ET schemes are reporting that their effectiveness is being measured by the number of trainees they get through the Associated Examining Board Basic English Test.

At present there is a great upsurge of interest throughout ABE in the whole question of assessment, recording progress and certification. This seems to be a double edged sword. On the one hand it gives a great boost for a student to pass an exam or receive some public, formal recognition of progress and achievement. However, it must be said that this is irrelevant for many of our students.

Contrary to Whitehall's thinking, not all our students are motivated by the desire to improve their job prospects. A large number of people come to classes because they want to help their children or because they need basic skills in their everyday life, and for some of these people assessment may be at least irrelevant at at worst intimidating.

There is perhaps an inherent danger that we will have two categories of students: those who want or need certification and those who don't, and the latter category may lose out.

So far this seems to be a picture of doom and gloom but there is a ray of hope on the horizon.

In the past literacy developed in an inchoate, disparate way and arose from a spirit of liberalism, for want of a better word.

In the nineteenth century the Mechanics Institutes helped individuals to help themselves to a better future through education and this spirit in a sense continues. LEAs and colleges accept that ABE will not make a profit, nor necessarily improve their image but it is morally right. The danger in this approach is that good intentions are often eroded by cash flow problems!

Now education is increasingly "enterprise driven". ABE is

going to have to pay its way and, ironically, this might prove to be our salvation.

We are bombarded by reports of an impending labour shortage, that the number of school leavers is set to hit an all time low in the mid 1990s and that employers will have to cast their net wider. There has been much media coverage of creches in the workplace and enhanced packages for women returning to work.

We are told that training and retraining are priorities and that employers, the Training Agency and the forthcoming TECs will have to address this problem of a workforce which lacks the required skills.

ABE tutors throughout the country know that one of the first problems to be faced is that some 1 in 8 of the adult population need help in overcoming problems with reading, writing and numeracy. Employers are gradually waking up to the idea that they are losing money by having a workforce that is only partially literate. Profit is a very powerful motive for action. Employers are also more accustomed than some other agencies to the notion of paying for experts. We may yet see a powerful pressure group for ABE developing from this unexpected quarter.

What can ABE workers do to secure their own future? First and foremost we need to ensure that ABE is not overlooked by the planners. This is difficult because many ABE workers are part-timers and often do not have access to the decision makers. Also ABE students are not a very vocal group.

It is important that ABE is included on the colleges FE Plans (formerly the Non Advanced Further Education – NAFE – Plan) because any subject areas not included there will miss out on direct delegated funding.

We need to become better at marketing our expertise and ensuring that we devote more time than formerly to co-ordinating our efforts.

The Education Reform Act is a great challenge to ABE workers. The benefits are that ABE provision may become better organised and more securely placed on the Education agenda, with proper funding, a more coherent structure and reaching more students. On the other hand, ABE may become a marginal activity for LEAs.

If we are not careful we may see a service largely in the hands of private providers and with an undue emphasis on certification.

1990 is the year when it's all set to happen. It would be a particularly bitter irony if International Literacy Year were also the year in which many schemes went to the wall.

Towards a Community Education Strategy for Adults

RAY PHILLIPS

Ray Phillips is the Director of Newham Parents Centre, a large voluntary organisation in East London. In this article he argues for partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors in adult basic eduction.

"(A comprehensive service of adult education must be) rooted firmly in local communities, responsive to local variations of need and opportunity, and with the active involvement of the local community in planning and management. One reason for this is clearly that education is a local government service and adult education must be an integral part of it. But more importantly perhaps, the cohesion and sense of identity of a local community depends largely on the vitality of the groups that compose it; and one of the functions of adult education will be to form and sustain such groupings and to promote their interaction. A local adult education service is a requisite of community life."

RUSSELL REPORT, Adult Education: A Plan for Development, 1973 P.21

"... an increasingly important function of the local education authorities will be to co-ordinate the range of provision and disseminate information about it, as well as to provide educational opportunities on their own account."

ACACE, Continuing Education: From Policies to Practice, 1982 P.17

"The purpose of the planning process is to determine what changes are needed to the existing broad pattern of provision in order that it may meet more effectively the changing needs of the population of the authority's area ....

Each authority's planning will in addition need to take account of ... adult education provided ... voluntary bodies, particularly where joint provision with colleges is now made or is in prospect."

DES CIRCULAR 9/88 Education Reform Act 1988: Local Management of Further and Higher Education Colleges: Planning and Delegation Schemes and Articles of Government 2.6-2.9

INTRODUCTION

The Education Reform Act has nothing to say directly about adult education. As with the 1944 Education Act, we have to read between the lines to discover any concern for adults. In a similarly determined way, non-statutory agencies have to struggle for recognition in the cut and thrust of developments within adult basic education.

Perhaps, this is inevitable given the estimated drop in the share of total adult literacy provision offered by the voluntary sector from 35-40% in 1973, to 5-10% in 1977, to 2% in 1988 (1) Certainly, the period in question has witnessed a dramatic growth in statutory provision under the influence of first the Adult Literacy Agency, then the Adult Literacy Unit and now the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. Yet, when the last statistic is collected, the all-encompassing Education Reform Act accepts a system that includes most children and EXCLUDES most adults. Part of this exlusion lies in the way in which so much adult learning in the community is 'defined out' of acknowledged formal adult education. Those seeking to promote adult initiative and empowerment through programmes of community education do not expect to find themselves in the above-noted 2%, despite the fact that they are heavily engaged in adult basic education.

The Report of the government-sponsored committee chaired by Lord Russell repeatedly states that education should meet the needs of the community and should be a service for the local community. In this report Adult Education is but part of the broader educational arm of local public services. Conventional modes of provision are clearly successful with a minority. We generally accept that initial achievement in the education system leads some to use further institutional forms of continuing education. However, other approaches are necessary when addressing the majority who are still not involved in continuing education. Traditional institutions, approaches and indeed subject areas do not have sufficient relevance to attract the established working class or contemporary 'underclass':

"... adult educators need to find more adequate reasons than 'a lack of confidence to come forward' or a generalised disapproval of school education to explain the lack of take-up of the educational opportunities in adult education among working class adults. The individualism of adult education itself and a curriculum which reflects middle-class life-styles may be a sufficient deterrent in themselves."[2]

Such a critique recognises that failure lies, not within the people who do not make use of available provision, but within the provision offered.

If we move to our own concern for adult basic education, then we must recognise that significantly extending provision to those in need does challenge the endemic elitism of our post-school institutions. We need to reappraise our relationship with the local community. The task is highly problematic. So much is clear from the comparatively well documented experience of the government Eductional Priority Area Programme which attempted to marry schooling to community development. As critics have noted,[3] the power of institutional conservation reduced the overall effect of the initiative to one of creating Education Priority Schools with minimal effect on the wider community.

Colleges, more than schools, have historically secured even more immunity from the 'extraneous needs' of their neighbourhood. The academic ivory tower has been far more successful in resisting the advances of the local citizenry than of industry or of central government. If we have a sincere regard for those many excluded adults in need, then, as we make our way through yet another phase of Further Education 'planning' (this time prompted by the Education Reform Act), we should take careful heed of advice from UDACE:

"Authorities are also likely to need to consult with the wide range of voluntary organisations which provide education and training for adults within their area, and those which represent the interests of particular groups of actual and potential users .... Where there is a lack of formal – or informal – consultative mechanisms, Authorities may need to develop ways in which effective liaison can take place".[4]

PRE-CONDITIONS

Any adequate strategy for the development of a public service must have due regard for agreed social goals. This requirement is all the more evident with areas such as Adult Education, in

general, and Adult Basic Education, in particular, where there is no statutory duty to provide placed upon a local education authority. However, this freedom to develop, or not to develop, is a source of potential strength as well as weakness in the face of relentless social pressures now mounting within areas such as our inner cities.

In adult and post-school education, as in the other sectors of the education service, there is an over-riding concern for 'achievement'. Our best endeavours must be secured to enable citizens, young and old, to achieve individual fulfilment. Yet, community education as community development seeks to transcend a narrow individualism based on competitive selection by fostering values which are crucial to the health of a caring, responsible and democratic society:

> *". . . we see community development as a strategy for achieving the involvement of people, through their organisations, groups and institutions, in the formulation, implementation, maintenance and revision of social policy at both central and local government level ... (community development is) a key instrument for bringing people into the processes of policy making".*[5]

This approach recognises that in adult basic education, as in all educational activity, students are acquiring technical and social skills at the same time. In many urban areas, much work has now been undertaken to develop Equal Opportunities policies which directly impinge on education practice through notions such as 'equity'. Thus, for example, statutory and voluntary agencies in the London Borough of Newham, where I work in a Parents' Centre, have collaborated for some time within a comprehensive framework set by our analysis of social needs and trends:

> *"Patterns of employment (and unemployment) are likely to continue to change and every adult will have to retrain several times in their working life. There will be an increasing movement towards entering work at a later age and retiring earlier. There will be a greater need not only for vocational education, training and retraining, but also for adult, community and continuing education."*[6]

In essence, the Local Eduction Service is a public response to recognised social issues. Before considering the development of this response at post-school level, we might briefly examine the precise nature of such issues.

RECOGNISED SOCIAL ISSUES

The re-discovery of poverty in post World War II cities in the USA provided a major impetus for the formulation of urban educational policies in the West. Arguably, this urban social context is far more relevant for the development of adult basic education as community education within areas like Newham than the more sedate, rustic charms of village models associated with practitioners such as Henry Morris. Not surprisingly, the US Poverty Programme proved to be inspirational for the English EPA Programme which set out to challenge many of the comfortable myths surrounding "community education".

Lessons learned from this government programme extended into the practice of adult education have special significance as educational planners sit down around the table in response to DES Circulars:

> *"Labelling the problem one of 'disadvantage' or 'deprivation' is a convenient means of avoiding the full implications of the failure of adult education to encourage the active participation of the working class on its own activities . . . Nowhere is it recognised that the 'deprived' might have something to offer adult education or that sweeping changes are needed in the attitude and approach of adult educators to the whole issue of education, culture and social change."*[7]

Central government intervention in urban community development has been channelled since 1968 through the Traditional Urban Programme, now the Inner Area Programme. Significantly, this has nurtured some local voluntary agencies working in partnership with local government. The fostering of adult basic skills has been encouraged in so far as they address issues arising from community issues such as housing, race, welfare rights, special needs.

The dominant governmental concern of the past decade, however, has been about unemployment and this has brought the Department of Employment into the ascendancy with regard to the 'training agenda'. Resourced by the European Social Fund, this Department has dramatically transformed the make-up of much of the voluntary sector into the ranks of a national 'parachute' brigade rather than local guerilla fighters!

Nevertheless, the enduring crises of Western economies since the early 70s have raised important questions about the role and relevance of adult education across Europe:

> *"(a) adult education is ceasing to be regarded as a fringe area of formal education systems and becoming an integral part of a comprehensive and coherent permanent education service;*
>
> *(b) the traditional distinction drawn between vocational training and general education is being challenged almost everywhere;*
>
> *(c) the relationship between adult education and the needs of the community and individuals concerned is being strengthened in such a way as to improve the quality of the 'service provided'.*
>
> *This being so, it is no surprise that the development of new activities involving European co-operation is breaking new ground: the contribution of adult education to local and regional development."*[8]

At the launch of the Going Community Programme in the London Borough of Newham, emphasis was placed on the broad social changes currently forcing the pace of educational change. Rising unemployment, racial diversity, an ageing population and changing family structure (especially lone parent households) were highlighted as demanding an adult edcuation response.

Community education is fundamentally concerned with the equitable distribution of national and local resources as well as with meeting the needs of local people. In order to play the appropriate part in such a programme, Community Adult Education (including adult basic education) must, therefore, move away from a predominantly demand-based model towards a comprehensive strategy defined by local human needs such as – unemployment, retraining, schooling, family welfare, health, cultural diversity, social integration of people with disabilities, ageing, leisure, recreation.

Thus, if the education system is truly to serve the needs of the majority, then these are areas around which adult basic education might be focussed. Taxes and rates (community charge) are paid by all. Education is a right throughout life. If the numbers of adults benefitting from educational provision are to rise, then those services must be defined by the needs of the people – the community – not vice versa. In so far as voluntary organisations are their local voices, they must be seriously involved in the process of planning and execution. Education which faithfully serves the minority does not necessarily answer the needs of the majority!

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

The Agenda for Action so far identified is indeed long. A development Paper recently issued by UDACE identifies 17 items on a checklist.[9] Such length is predictable given the global approach adopted by the Education Reform Act. Yet, in the familiar hierarchical way in which the education service is

organised, there is the distinct danger that each segmented interest group will withdraw into a corner to produce a series of strategies dictated by professional convenience.

Working in a Parents' Centre, much of my work over the past 14 years has been driven by the need to challenge the fragmentation of the public services. Parents and other adults seeking to take advantage of local education provision are frequently confused by the bureaucratic niceties of a system based on selection. For Russell's 'minimally schooled',[10] educational doors are rarely open – and then you need to know which ones to push!

Notwithstanding this traditionally hostile predisposition of the 'education industry' in inner-city areas, agencies from the voluntary and statutory sectors in the London Borough of Newham recently combined to prescribe a way forward for adult education.

> *"Consistent with wider aims of the education service as a whole, community adult education must deliberately avoid discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion or handicap. There must be an even-handed respect for the rich cultural diversity of our East End community with a constant eye on the need for proper facilities for child-care and the handicapped.".*[11]

Working from this premise, the Newham Going Community Programme expanded on the following as priorities in the development of adult education.

Content

- pre-vocational education and training
- support for parents
- activities for retired people
- activities designed to promote health, welfare and civil liberties
- recreational activities

Method

- integration of people with special needs
- decentralisation
- outreach
- networking
- flexibility in timing of activities
- residential activities
- counselling and guidance
- partnership with other agencies

Taken together, these form an embryonic strategy for 'adequacy' in terms of the Education Reform Act. Necessarily, they will place heavy demands on any service for the Basic Education of Adults. Over the past year, this commitment to community partnership has promoted the active collaboration between the Newham Parents' Centre, Newham Community College and the Newham LEA in establishing at high street-level both an Access Training and Advice Centre under the Department of Environment's Inner Area Programme and an Open Learning Centre under the Department of Education and Science's Education Support Grant Programme.

Herein lies the scope for joint-venture planning between the voluntary and statutory sectors. Adult Basic education must be prepared to move onto the front foot.

> *"The basic education staff must seek out places of natural resort by the potential students – places of work, of social activity, of public enquiry, of resort for health and welfare, and the like – and exploit them imaginatively for educational provision. The underlying principle, which we cannot repeat too often, is that we must look for the best educational potential for the needs of the student and provide it wherever he may be found, rather than expect him to fit into preconcieved institutional structures".*[12]

Agencies in the non-statutory sector have a vital role to play in this 'offensive'. In an adjacent public sector debate about community care, Sir Roy Griffiths describes the roles of voluntary groups in addition to the direct provision of services as those of: self-help support group, information source/source of expertise, befriending agency, advocate for individuals, constructive critic of service providers, public educator, pilot of new approaches to services, campaigner[13]. Legislative calls to action, such as the Education Reform Act, should encourage us in adult basic education to find common cause with other public sector discussions rather than retreat into a meagre bunker.

The challenge facing a partnership of the statutory and non-statutory sectors working to develop a community-based strategy for adult education in general, and adult basic education in particular, is considerable. Yet, in many of our major cities, this project is but part of the greater design to regenerate local communities faced with the consequences of imposed industrial decline. Adult basic education is one important tool available to us. We must encourage its joint use by the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Finally, we might well draw inspiration from work currently underway in Australia where development of the public sector is set within an articulated framework of 'social justice':

> *"Acting alone, the Victorian Government cannot achieve a more just Victorian society .... The Government's relationship with community organisations is very significant for the achievement of a more just society. These organisations have a long-established concern for social justice, so can contribute effectively to the further development of the Government's policies. They also play an important role in the delivery of many of the services which are integral to this Strategy."*[14]

Three cheers for such Victorian values!

References:

1. See *"Adult Literacy: A Continuing Need"* The Final Report of the BAS Adult Literacy Project 1975-77 and *"After the Act – Developing Basic Skills Work in the 1990s"* ALBSU, 1988.
2. N. Keddie *"Adult Education: an ideology of individualism"* from 'Adult Education for a Change' Ed. J.L. Thomson 1980.
3. See for example K. Coates and R. Silburn *"Education in Poverty"* from "Education for Democracy" Ed. D. Rubinstein – C. Stoneman 1970.
4. *"Securing Adequate Facilities"* 1988 P.10.
5. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Working Party *"A National Centre for Community Development"* 1984.
6. Newham LEA Consultative Document *"Comprehensive Education for Life"* 1983.
7. T. Lovett *"Adult Education, Community Development and The Working Class"* 1975.
8. Council of Europe *"Adult Education and Community Development"* 1984.
9. UDACE *"Adults and the Act"* 1988.
10. Op. Cit. P.13.
11. Newham Education Committee *"Going Community – Community Education in Newham"* 1985.
12. ACACE *"A Strategy for the Basic Education of Adults"* 1979.
13. R. Griffiths *"Community Care: Agenda for Action"* 1988.
14. Government of Victoria, Australia *"People and Opportunities – Victoria's Social Justice Strategy"* 1987.

Basic Education For Adults Post ERA

ELIZABETH WEIGHTMAN

Elizabeth Weightman is a Development Officer at the Further Education Unit with particular responsibility for the education and training of adults.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly a year since the passing of the Education Reform Act and several months since the issue of DES Circulars 8/88 and 9/88 on the implementation of the Act and it is still unclear whether the optimists or the pessimists have won the day. The optimists are still stressing the opportunity for a radical review of further education, increased responsiveness and improved quality. The pessimists remain convinced that market forces will distort the curriculum, impede the development of coherent and accessible provision and diminish quality.

As schemes are drafted and the process of implementation in local authorities and colleges moves ahead it becomes increasingly important for the optimists to ensure that priorities are defined and that provision post 1989 is an improvement, both in terms of quantity and quality, on existing provision. This article will attempt to suggest some ways by which these aims could be achieved in the basic education of adults. It will suggest mechanisms for the achievement of improved standards and explore some of the problematic issues of provision for disadvantaged groups in a market led environment.

DEFINING PRIORITIES

In his recent speech to the Association of Colleges of Further and Higher Education, Kenneth Baker suggested that improvement in the quality and quantity of further education could be achieved by action on three fronts: the curriculum and qualifications on offer; the image and marketing of further education and the organisation of colleges following the Education Reform Act.[1] The order of precedence is important. The Eduction Reform Act is particularly relevant to the organisation of further education colleges but it is the curriculum and qualifications that are listed as priority areas for action.

Priorities for the curriculum are identified in the speech as: quality of provision; facilitating progression and getting the qualifications structure right. FEU in Towards a Framework for Curriculum Entitlement[2] indentified in more detail the aims, principles and procedures of the further education curriculum.

The aims of further education provision are stated as:

- the availability of appropriate learning opportunities to all those post 16 regardless of gender, race, age or ability;
- opportunities for all learners to establish and develop a recognised competence base of knowledge, skills and experience, sufficient to facilitate progression into employment, further education, training or other life roles;
- an understanding of the local and national economic and social environment, to promote an appreciation of the variety of available roles in society;
- a basis for learners to increase their self awareness, to appraise realistically their potential and prospects, and to become progressively responsible for negotiating their own personal development.

Fundamental principles of the further education curriculum framework are identified as:

- all learners having equal value;
- learners having access to appropriate programmes in the locality, within the physical and financial constraints prevailing at the time;
- learners having the opportunity and positive encouragement to maximise their own potential achievement;
- all learners being treated equally and benefiting from certain common experiences, regardless of the nature of their learning programmes.

In the implementation of this curriculum framework, certain educational procedures have been regarded as effective. These include: learner centredness; maximised accessibility; an integrated curriculum; guidance and counselling; personal development; optimised progression and equality of opportunity and experience. FEU states that these procedures form an essential part of a learner's entitlement and give a basis for equitable, quality educational provision. The aims, principles and procedures which constitute FEU's framework for curriculum entitlement can be used as a basis for planning at local authority and college level.

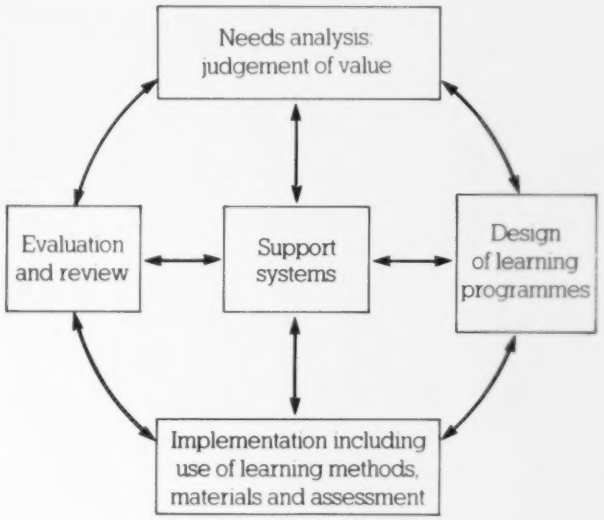
The idea of a core content for further education provision is referred to in Kenneth Baker's speech.[1] This content is defined as possibly including: communication; numeracy; personal relations; familiarity with technology; familiarity with employment systems and familiarity with changing work and social contexts. There is a suggestion in the speech that this core may be relevant to adults as well as to 16-19 year olds. The idea of a core curriculum content has, of course, been developed by initiatives such as TVEI and has been encouraged by HMI and FEU[3] and is included in the curriculum framework identified above. The opportunity to develop this core curriculum for post 16 year olds in the present context could result in the basic education of adults forming a more integrated part of further education provision with improved opportunities for access and progression.

The present priorities for the improvement of the basic education of adults post ERA are to contextualise provision within local authority and college strategic planning for post 16 year olds, to ensure that adult basic education relates to the aims, principles and procedures of the curriculum framework and, in particular, that it forms part of a core curriculum content to which a maximum number of adults have access.

IMPROVING PROVISION

As ALBSU noted in their publication "After the Act" basic skills provision for adults is marked by its diversity. Provision takes place in several sectors of post school education, and although LEAs are the main providers many other agencies are also involved. Within local authorities basic skills provision in different sectors of post 16 education can result in a variety of approaches, inequitable provision and impaired opportunities for progression.

Developing from the values, aims, principles and procedures of the curriculum framework for post 16 year olds improvement in the quantity and quality of basic education for adults may be achieved by adopting certain procedures at local authority and institutional levels. These procedures would be related to different aspects of the curriculum development cycle as defined by FEU: needs analyses, design, implementation, evaluation and review. (see Figure 1 below)


Needs analysis: judgement of value
Evaluation and review
Support systems
Design of learning programmes
Implementation including use of learning methods, materials and assessment

Needs Analysis

Both authorities and colleges can make use of national research in terms of analysing needs for basic education. ALBSU, the Training Agency and the National Child Development Study have information giving indications of need for a range of basic skills education: literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages. County co-ordinators, inspectors, officers and advisers may also hold information concerning needs at a more local level. Staff working in basic education will have information on individual student needs.

In local authorities and colleges it is particularly important that such information is utilised by all those responsible for relevant curriculum planning. Marketing officers need to ensure that data is collected and that it is used by local authorities and college management in their planning processes.

In planning and implementing provision under the Education Reform Act college student number allocations can be related to TOC categories or to DES or other classifications but may also relate to client groups such as those requiring basic education. Modes of attendance and student weightings can also be used to steer provision to particular areas of need and basic education for adults may be given a particular weighting. In some authorities the part time FTE (Full Time Equivalent) totals will be increased by 10% to account for extra costs relevant to full time students. Such opportunities for flexibility should be used by colleges and authorities to respond to the analysis of needs and to improve basic education provision.

The analysis of needs for basic education should focus on existing participants in the further education system as well as on the needs of non-participants. Consequent curriculum design may therefore be a combination of support for existing students and special provision.

Curriculum Design

Curriculum design, as with needs analysis, is a multi-level activity. Local authorities may be involved to some extent in determining modes of delivery, college management in determining the design of content, process and outcomes and staff in the design of content, process and outcomes in more detail.

The curriculum framework states that learners should have access to appropriate programmes. Thus learning programmes need to be individually designed with an initial assessment process which includes the assessment of prior learning and achievement. The design of a learning programme needs to take account of a core curriculum content but also to recognise the full range of learning opportunities available. In the case of basic education for adults staff involved in initial assessment need to be aware of the full range of provision on offer or to be aware of appropriate agencies for referral.

Individualised learning programmes also need to reflect the variety of modes of delivery on offer and to take account of the procedures identified in the curriculum framework. In particular basic education programmes will need to include guidance and counselling, personal development and opportunities for progression and to include a range of modes of delivery: open learning, group learning etc.

Implementation

Curriculum implementation is an area where developments in the qualifications structure, in particular NVQs, will have an impact in the future. Although certain learning experiences are derived from the curriculum framework: skills including performance-related (product skills) and activity-related skills (process skills); knowledge; experience and learning support, the development of NVQs will increase the need to deliver training based on competences.

NCVQ is at present considering the development of generic competences which may relate to basic education. The implementation of the curriculum will need to adjust to these new forms of assessment which include work based assessment.

In addition to competence-based assessment it may be important for curriculum implementation to include other formative assessment procedures and the recording of achievement.

Teaching and learning strategies will need to reflect the values of the curriculum framework and in particular be orientated to increasing student autonomy, equality of opportunity, maximising achievement and opportunities for progression.

Ongoing guidance and counselling as an integrated part of the learning process will assist students in the re-negotiation of their learning programmes and the progressive achievement of these aims.

Evaluation and Review

Evaluation and review is becoming, alongside needs analysis and curriculum design an increasingly important element in the curriculum development cycle. The process of keeping the curriculum under review remains partly an LEA responsibility but increasingly post ERA becomes a college or institutional responsibility. Staff and managers will have a greater role to play in the evaluation and review process. Such a process is dependent on value judgements being made and therefore on the establishment of a curriculum framework.

Each institution will need to establish mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and review and quality assurance. It is particulary important that such procedures take account of the added value of educational provision for students and the ability of providers to be responsive to local community needs as well as quantitative data on student enrolments, achievements, destinations and course completion rates. FEU has published Towards an Educational Audit[5] which should assist institutions in gathering and using relevant information.

Basic education providers need to be aware of the importance of recording information on staff, student and employer perceptions as well as monitoring enrolments, achievements, destinations and completion rates.

CONCLUSION

There is, in the current climate of changed legislation and the development of a new qualifications structure, the opportunity to take the side of the optimists. There can be a review of provision which can lead to improved quantity and quality. This is only achievable where authorities and institutions acknowledge their purpose and define a curriculum framework for post 16 provision. Basic eduation should not lie outside this framework. It is essentially part of the core provision for the post 16 population and a pursuit of the procedures outlined above for improving the quality of provision should result in a re-allocation of resources and increased responsiveness and accountability.

The pessimists may be convinced that a more market led further education service will be unable to provide for disadvantaged groups but if the aims, principles and procedures of a curriculum framework are established, accepted and implemented by college management and local authorities there is the opportunity for the optimists to win the day.

References

1. *Speech to the Association of Colleges of Further Education*, Kenneth Baker 1989
2. *Towards a Framework for Curriculum Entitlement*, FEU, 1989
3. *A Basis for Choice*, FEU, 1979
   Relevance, Flexibility and Competence, FEU, 1988
   Supporting Adult Learning, FEU, 1987
4. *Towards a Framework for Curriculum Entitlement*, FEU, 1989
5. *Towards an Educational Audit*, FEU, 1989

Available from:
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit,
Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn,
London WC1V 7DA.
Tel: 01-405 4017

ALBSU
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

£1.25
plus postage and packing

© The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit,
Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be photocopied, recorded or otherwise reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Published May 1989
ISSN 0 266-20989
Design Studio 21